KUALA LUMPUR: All 1,609 students who obtained between 9A's+ and 12A's+ in the 2011 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) would be offered automatic bursary to pursue pre-university courses locally.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the Education Ministry would provide bursaries for pre-university courses, prior to the students' first degree, locally or abroad. Muhyiddin, who is also Education Minister added that the automatic bursaries would be given out regardless of ethnicity, race or background, as a token of the government's recognition for excellence achieved by the students.

"The government is compassionate towards the parents of students who excel but do not get sponsored to further their studies due to stiff competition. However, the government also has its financial constraints since the cost of education keeps rising," he said in a statement here yesterday.

He noted that the government had spent RM2.12 billion for the overall expenses for this year's local and overseas universities intake.

The programmes covered by the bursaries include Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM), Matriculation, Foundation (under the Higher Education Ministry leading up to certain local institutions of higher learning), the International Baccalaureate (IB) and A-Level, he said. However, the IB and A-Level would not be extended to competitive fields such as medicine, dentistry and pharmaceutical, he added.

He also clarified that the bursaries were dependent on the students being offered a place at the centres identified by the government and updates on the matter were available on www.moe.gov.my from April 16 onwards.

Muhyiddin added that the bursary students needed to obtain a minimum of 3.5 cumulative grade points on average to be eligible for the Public Services Department scholarships to universities abroad in 2014.

He said Medical, Dentistry and Pharmacy students, on the other hand, should get an unconditional offer from any one of the world's top 10 universities, while students in other fields should get unconditional offers from any one of the 50 renowned universities based on the annually updated list and recognised fields.

On the sponsorship for 10,300 students pursuing degree after completing their preparation programme, Muhyiddin said they must score at least CGPA 3.5 or equivalent and received offers from public universities, except Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSRI) and government-linked company universities like Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) and Universiti Multimedia (MMU). Students offered to enter foreign university campuses in Malaysia like University of Nottingham, Monash University, Swinburne University of Technology, Curtin University of Technology, Newcastle University Medicine (NUMed) Malaysia, AIMST University, UniKL-Royal College of Medicine Perak, University College Sedaya International, Cyberjaya University College of Medical Sciences and International Medical University are also eligible for sponsorship.

The Deputy Prime Minister said to pursue a study in PSD-sponsored engineering programmes in Japan, Korea, France and Germany, students must make an online application via the PSD website and fulfill the four required criteria and pass a PSD interview.